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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515-6015

March 6, 2000

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The Honorable J. Dennis Hastert
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Speaker:

I am writing to express serious reservations over the recently-announced conference agreement on the Aviation Investment and Reform Act for the 21st Century (AIR21). In fiscal year 2001 alone, the bill requires \$2.7 billion more in spending for the FAA than provided last year and \$1.5 billion above the President's budget request. Over the next three years, this bill would result in \$10 billion in additional spending above the fiscal year 2000 baseline. This will either come at the expense of other important domestic programs or diminish our ability to use the surplus to reduce the national debt.

The agreement also dangerously skews federal investment priorities in aviation, by using almost all available funding for airport construction grants and air traffic control modernization programs, leaving the FAA with a huge shortfall in their operating budget. For fiscal year 2001, the bill guarantees an appropriation of \$10.5 billion for the FAA. However, the bill earmarks \$6.2 billion of that amount for capital programs, leaving only \$4.3 billion for FAA's operating budget. FAA is requesting \$6.6 billion for that appropriation. It is naïve to think that we will be able to pay the bills for a sharply increased airport and air traffic control modernization program while at the same time fully funding FAA's operations account. And because of past Congressional action, the Appropriations Committee has limited flexibility to reduce other programs without adversely impacting the

Coast Guard or Amtrak. This bill puts concrete first and air traffic controllers and safety inspectors last, which is a dangerous change in federal priorities.

Equally significant, the agreement includes three separate House points of order which legislatively amend the Rules of the House to prohibit any Member from changing key aspects of the agreement during the life of the Act. A small number of conferees should not have the right to tie the hands of all other Members – including those in future Congresses – in order to cut a deal favorable to them today. Times change; federal priorities change; and the country's needs change. The House leadership and the Congress need to preserve flexibility to address those changes as they arise. Points of order such as these are an affront to the leadership, to the Committee on Rules, and to my Committee, which produces bills under your guidance and instructions. No special interest or Committee, no matter how powerful, should be able to dictate to the leadership which bills or amendments to allow on the floor at a given time, and that is exactly what this agreement does.

For these reasons, I cannot support the AIR21 conference agreement. It is a bad bill for the Federal Aviation Administration, potentially throwing the agency into chaos. It is a bad bill for the American taxpayer, which needs a balanced aviation program and a well-financed FAA. And it is a terrible bill for the prerogatives and flexibility of my Committee. I intend to vote against this bill, and will work to defeat the conference report if it comes to the floor in its present form.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bill Young", written in a cursive style.

C. W. Bill Young
Chairman